

February 24, 2019

The Deeper Things

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.." Hebrew 5:8-9

"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again...Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings of Christ and go on to maturity." Hebrews 5:8-6:3

One of the most important attributes, I think, shared by true disciples is their constant personal spiritual growth or maturing. The process of being transformed means, for the true disciple, a life time committed to being changed. So all true believers should be growing and developing in their faith.

Any of us who become satisfied with 'going to church' are, frankly, unlikely to experience this maturing process. It is easy to sit in a church building on a Sunday morning and to perform the actions associated with a service without actually being changed in any way at all by the experience.

However, when we understand God's Word as it reflects our own personal experience, when we diligently apply that Word to our immediate interactions and relationships, and when we intentionally mute the constant influence of the world tempting us to lose sight of what really matters, we can truly begin to mature.

A maturing disciple should literally be transformed over time into the living image of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul would describe this experience in himself, ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*** (Galatians 2:20-21) In this passage, and in deed in much of Paul's writing, we find this call to maturity, to becoming more and more like Jesus.

As we consider the Apostle's words we find, I think, a road map to this kind of maturity. Paul writes, ***"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live..."*** True maturity begins with this willingness to let go of our own self-serving ways; to literally put them to death.

Paul would write to the Roman believers, ***"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*** (Romans 6:11) Maturity for the true disciple begins with death to the self. While this sounds easy, it is anything but easy. Just think about how often in the last week you have thought about, argued for, or worked to get your own way. All of us live almost entirely to serve ourselves. We love to express our opinion. We choose to live by our own rules. We are constantly driven by a desire to get our own way.

For those who would mature as disciples this road ends and we intentionally begin to choose the will and way modeled by Jesus Christ; not just occasionally, but all the time. The Apostle says, ***"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..."*** For the mature disciple this means that when the world invites me to state my opinion, Jesus speaks through me. When the world invites me to act in my own way, Jesus acts through me. When the world insists that I take a stand, I take Jesus' stand.

"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..." For those satisfied with 'going to church' and doing the 'right' things in the 'right' ways is enough. But for those who would truly choose to follow

Jesus the ultimate end product must be, *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..."* For the mature disciple self ceases to exist and only Jesus remains.

The Hebrew author calls us to *"...go on to maturity..."* Paul would tell the Philippian believers, *"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things"* (Philippians 3:13-15)

As you and I take stock of our own spiritual development, do we see someone who is growing and maturing, who is becoming more and more the reflection of Jesus? Can we honestly claim, *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..."*?

Discipleship: Becoming More Like CHRIST

EPHESIANS 2:10